

JUSTICE COMMITTEE

HATE CRIME AND PUBLIC ORDER (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM CELT STREET EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The following points are made in response to the Call for Views on the above Bill.

**Hate Crimes and Public Order (Scotland) Bill - Part 2:**

3. Offences of stirring up hatred

While hate crimes are a scourge on society which we would all like to see eliminated, as elders of a local independent church we are very concerned that this Bill as it presently stands will create some very undesirable and probably unintended consequences, and we feel we must bring these to your attention, as follows:

- 1) When a church seeks to explain and defend its views, quoting the Bible as its authority is not and should not be construed as "hate speech". Hatred is an aggressive attitude which should not be confused with propounding an alternative point of view whether or not the alternative point of view conforms to a secular worldview.
- 2) In introducing any new stirring up hatred offences they ought only to deal with conduct that is intended to stir up hatred. It is all too easy for someone in our current social media influenced culture who simply does not like the other persons point of view, to claim they are a victim of "hate speech", it is far too subjective.
- 3) Disagreement is not hatred. Yet as drafted this Bill will be a charter for special interest groups to label disagreement as hate speech in an attempt to silence their opponents. I note that Police Scotland is quoted as saying that free speech clauses are required in the Bill to prevent them from being inundated with vexatious complaints. This is a very relevant point and I think it needs to be taken on board.
- 4) A free society must protect the right to disagree, the right to put an opposing point of view or belief, without it being labelled "hate speech". The bill needs to concentrate on dealing with what really is "hate speech" and not criminalise the innocent.
- 5) The term "Abusive", is too subjective and can readily be used by activists claiming they are a victim, where no abuse was intended, nor indeed existed to any rational thinking person.
- 6) In any democracy freedom of speech is a fundamental human right, but this Bill at present undermines that key right. In a modern civilised country having and propounding a view which may neither be popular nor "politically correct" should not be hate speech or criminalised.

7) Lord Bracadale's Independent Review on Hate Crime report, which led to this Bill, stressed the need for a clear distinction between legitimate debate and rabble rousing; it is very clear that this Bill at present does not come close to achieving this.

We trust that you will give due weight to these important points offered constructively to help in the finalising of this Bill, resulting for sure in a more effective and efficient Bill for all the people of Scotland.

Celt Street Evangelical Church  
24 July 2020